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ABSTRACT

This digest summarizes in a question and answer format a full length report of the same title. It addresses the importance of recruiting minority students for diversity at institutions of higher education. Noted are increasing numbers for these groups along with the current low education levels found among minorities and the potential shortage of qualified workers. The institution's role in recruiting for diversity is identified as two fold: first, to serve as a center for debate about the issues involved and second, to determine ways in which it can incorporate diversity within itself. Universities are encouraged to recognize and appreciate differences among minority groups and stress, as well as recruitment, factors encouraging persistence to graduation including admissions, financial aid, retention strategies, and involvement of many areas and individuals. Ideally an institution wide effort at minority recruitment is seen as a process with the active support of top administrators. (Included are 8 references.) (Author/JB)

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Pursuing Diversity: Recruiting College Minority Students

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Why Is the Recruitment of Minorities An Important National Concern?

Present and future trends in population growth and in participation in higher education reveal that people of color in the United States are a dramatically increasing but seriously undereducated segment of society. By 2000, minorities will account for roughly 30 percent of the population (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1990c). Even now, 27 percent of all public school students in the 24 largest city school systems are minorities (Hodgkinson 1986). Yet for nearly all minority groups, high school graduation rates are significantly lower than for the majority, and entry rates of college-age minorities into higher education are actually shrinking.

Government and industry alike have noted the potential economic effect of these alarming trends in education. With the projected increases in the minority population, the situation threatens to affect the national economy. Given the present level of minority education, the potential shortage of qualified workers equipped to meet the needs of the market is a serious concern (**Economist** 1990b; Hodgkinson 1983). Institutions of higher education are being called upon to exercise leadership in helping to address these problems before they take on even more critical proportions. The recruitment of minority students must therefore not only focus on more aggressive strategies to recruit those students who are already well prepared but also encompass long-term initiatives to improve existing educational conditions.

What Is the Institution's Role in Recruiting for Diversity?

Higher education institutions are the traditional centers for scholarly debate, research, innovation, and change in social matters. Increasing the presence of minorities and of minority perspectives in all aspects of the college and university is, in its broadest sense, a question of social change. Universities can provide vision, energy, leadership, and direction to other institutions, from school systems to government to business and industry, first to establish firmly the goal of excellence in minority education and then to pursue and achieve it (American Council on Education 1988). Through investigation into the subject of minority education and the effectiveness of responses at various levels, higher education institutions can bring the issue into focus. But beyond the social role, colleges and universities need to determine the ways in which diversity will be incorporated locally by identifying what the problems are with regard to their own institution. Are minority enrollments and graduation rates low and, if so, why? Do minority students feel welcome and are they part of the college community? Colleges need to evaluate their mission, objectives and policies, and the allocation of resources with minority education in mind.

How Are Minority Groups Distinct—From Each Other and from the Majority?

Because they share many common concerns, people of color are frequently referred to as a single group. In fact, however, this population of African-Americans, Hispanics, Asian-Americans, and American Indians consists of an enormous variety of people from different racial, ethnic, language, and cultural backgrounds. As a group, clear distinctions—social, economic, and educational—can be made between minorities and the majority. Additionally, the obstacles they encounter include some that are not part of the experience of most majority students, even those who are disadvantaged. Limited proficiency in English and racial and ethnic prejudice are two examples.

With regard to higher education, however, the nature of the problems in each minority community is somewhat different, and each situation calls for solutions that are informed and responsive to the needs of each community. Preparation for college, language proficiency, immigrant or nonimmigrant (or refugee) status, time in the United States, gender, cultural influences, and financial condition are only some of the factors that vary from group to group and could have more or less significance in a particular minority group's educational profile. Recognizing and understanding the differences within and among the various minority populations are an important preface to the larger goal of achieving cultural diversity in higher education.

How Is the Recruitment of Minority Students Related to Other Institutional Concerns?

Because the ultimate goal in recruiting minority students must be graduation, recruitment is not an objective that can be pursued in isolation. The better integrated it is with the college's educational programs and services, the more opportunity it will have for success. Admissions and financial aid policies,

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strategies for retention, and opportunities for transfer are some of the areas intricately tied to recruitment that therefore can share common objectives (Carnegie Foundation 1989; Lenning, Beal, and Sauer 1980). Organizing strategies for recruitment that combine the human and financial resources of all these areas can be cost-effective. Above all, however, it will disseminate minority recruitment throughout the institution.

Effective recruitment of minority students should not only be coordinated with many different areas of the institution but also enlist the participation of people from different departments and at various levels of responsibility to work in concert as part of a comprehensive plan. Nontraditional models of recruitment teams can have significant success. Administrators, faculty, and staff from academic departments, including ethnic studies programs and centers, student services, and special program offices, such as economic opportunity programs, can be organized to participate in the institution's strategy for recruitment.

Who Should Recruit, When, Where, and How?

Even when a formal structure for recruiting minority students exists, the function is commonly located in one of several different areas within a college's organizational structure. The recruitment of minorities can be administered through the regular operations of the admissions office, by a specially appointed officer, or through a variety of other possibilities. Rather than the location of the office, however, it is the institution's commitment to improving the education of minorities that will ultimately endow recruitment with its potential to be effective (Christoffel 1986). In this sense, the leadership and involvement of top administrators are fundamental.

Ideally an institutionwide effort conceived as a process rather than a program, recruitment of minority students would optimally engage all constituencies of the college—faculty, administrators, staff, and students—in a well-developed and deliberate plan designed to achieve specific, reasonable goals. The plan should be based on a comprehensive institutional audit reflecting the profile and present educational situation of minorities at the institution. It should be cooperatively designed, including the perspectives of those who will implement it, and should delineate the methods and resources designed to achieve its objectives within a stated time. Finally, it should be monitored, evaluated, and periodically modified to reflect changing conditions and to capitalize on aspects that emerge as being particularly successful.

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